

Message Text

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ACTION EB-07

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R 231635Z JUL 75

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9539

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DEPT. PASS TO: R. BOURDON, MARITIME ADMINISTRATION

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EWWT, VE

SUBJECT: PORT CONGESTION

REF CARACAS 4356, 6136

1. LOCAL PRESS JULY 16/17 REPORTS THAT ON JULY 15 PRESIDENT OF REPUBLIC DISPATCHED FIVE CABINET MINISTERS TO TOUR LA GUAIRA FOR PURPOSE OF RECOMMENDING IMMEDIATE MEASURES TO ALLEVIATE GRAVE CONGESTION AT THAT PORT AS WELL AS AT PUERTO CABELLO, THE NATION'S TWO PRINCIPAL PORTS. INCLUDED IN THE ON-THE-SPOT INVESTIGATION WERE MINISTERS OF TREASURY, COMMUNICATIONS, DEVELOPMENT, PUBLIC WORKS AND DEFENSE AS WELL AS THE DIRECTOR OF NATIONAL PORTS, THE ADMINISTRATOR OF CUSTOMS AND OTHER GOVT OFFICIALS.

2. AMONG REMEDIES SUGGESTED BY THE GROUP ON COMPLETION OF THE TOUR WERE PREPARATION OF ADDITIONAL STORAGE SPACE FOR INCOMING CARGOES; ACQUISITION AND REPAIR OF NEEDED EQUIPMENT; REVISION OF BULK GRAIN AND FERTILIZER PROGRAMS TO ALLOW FOR MORE EXPEDITIOUS HANDLING OF THESE IMPORTS; USE OF MILITARY VEHICLES TO REMOVE MERCHANDISE FROM PORT AREAS; PROHIBITION OF BULK GRAIN VESSEL DIVERSIONS FROM A PORT HAVING ADEQUATE SILOS AND DISCHARGING FACILITIES UNCLASSIFIED

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TO A PORT WITH LESS THAN ADEQUATE FACILITIES; RAPID WITHDRAWAL

OF CARGOES BY CONSIGNEES AND RECEIVERS, AND AUCTIONING OFF WITHOUT DELAY OF ABANDONED MERCHANDISE. PLANS ARE ALREADY IN EFFECT TO BEGIN CONSTRUCTION OF JAN 1, 1976, OF NEW BERTHING AND WARE-HOUSING FACILITIES AT LA GUAIRA AND PUERTO CABELLO.

3. AGENT FOR U.S. FLAG AND FOREIGN LINES HERE REPORTED THAT ON JULY 15 THERE WERE 17 VESSELS AWAITING BERTH WITH AVERAGE WAITING TIME OF SEVEN DAYS, WHEREAS ON JULY 17 THERE WERE ONLY FOUR VESSELS AWAITING BERTHS WITH AVERAGE WAITING TIME OF THREE DAYS. HE SUGGESTED THAT PERHAPS INVESTIGATION OF LA GUAIRA BY HIGH RANKING OFFICIALS COULD PROVE TO BE THE CATALYST LEADING TO IMPROVED CONDITIONS AT VENEZUELAN PORTS ALTHOUGH HE PREDICTED THAT FINAL SOLUTION WILL TAKE AT LEAST FIVE YEARS. AGENT SAID THAT THREAT"

OF USING MILITARY VEHICLES, AMONG OTHER MEASURES, TO HELP ALLEVIATE THE CONGESTION AT LA GUIRA HAS HAD A POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE SITUATION

, PARTICULARLY INsofar AS THE UNION AND ITS TRUCKERS ARE CONCERNED WHICH, HE ALLEGED, HAVE BEEN ENGAGED IN DELIBERATE POLITICALLY MOTIVATED SLOWDOWNS. COMMENT: WITH THE BEGINNING OF THE TRADITIONAL YEAR END CRUSH OF IMPORTS USUALLY OCCURRING ABOUT THE FIRST OF OCT DUE TO THE SEASONALLY HIGH LEVEL OF CONSUMER IMPORTS FOR THE DEC HOLIDAYS, IN ADDITION TO THE OFFICIAL NON-WORKING DAYS AND THE ABNORMALLY HIGH DEGREE OF ABSENTEEISM DURING THE LATTER PART OF THE YEAR, THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE EMERGENCY MEASURES CONTEMPLATED BY THE GOVT MUST BE IMPLEMENTED IMMEDIATELY AND ADHERED TO ON A CONTINUAL BASIS TO PREVENT FURTHER SERIOUS DETERIORATION OF THE PORTS SITUATION.

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